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Antecedents and Consequences of Generation Y Hospitality Employees Innovative Behaviour: Assessing the Moderating Effect of Supervisor Support

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Abstract

The continued significance of the tourism industry rests on its ability to nurture creativity. A key component of this industry's workforce is Gen Y who are expected to be at the forefront in innovation. The study examined antecedents and consequences of innovative work behaviour and the moderating influence of supervisors among Gen Y employees in the hospitality industry in Kenya. Informed by the positivist philosophical school of thought and leaning towards explanatory research design, we targeted Gen Y employees drawn from star rated hotels in Nairobi City County. Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires and Hayes' Macro 'PROCESS' approach was used to test whether supervisor support moderates the relationship between the identified antecedents and Gen Y employees' innovative behaviour. The study established that work design ($B=0.426$, $p<0.001$), corporate strategy ($B=0.243$, $p<0.001$), and forming groups and networks ($B=0.277$, $p<0.001$) were positive and significant antecedents of Gen Y employees' innovative behavior in the hospitality industry. In addition, the test of highest order unconditional interaction revealed that supervisor support was critical in moderating the relationship between these antecedents and Gen Y employees' innovative behavior. Conclusively, it is imperative that supervisors take a leading role in harnessing innovativeness among Gen Y employees.

Keywords: Antecedents and consequences, Innovative behaviour, Generation Y, Hospitality employees, Supervisor support, Nairobi – Kenya.

1. Introduction

Generation Y individuals also referred to as Millennials and abbreviated Gen Y are poised to play a significant role towards the success of the tourism industry in general. This generation of individuals who were born in the period between 1980 and 2000 is known to be smart in technology (Smith & Nichols, 2015; Bannon, Ford & Meltzer, 2011); an attribute that places them at the forefront of innovation, and at the driving seat for competitiveness. This is especially so given that technology is recognized as an important strategic competitiveness asset (Nyheim, McFadden & Connolly, 2004; Nolan, 2015). Besides, the generation is famed for its high regard and preference for social media and social networks (Latiff, Uckurn, & Demir, 2015; Ferri-Reed, 2014). The affinity that Gen Y individuals have for technology is no doubt the panacea for the hospitality industry to remain competitive in the wake of global competition and new advancements.

The hospitality industry through the travel and tourism sector remains central to Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with reports indicating that the industry contributed a total sum of Ksh 257.4bn (approx. USD 2bn) to the GDP in 2016 (WTTC, 2017). With extant literature recognizing the importance of innovation in the growth and performance of enterprises (Eisingerich, Rubera & Seifert, 2009) and in determining competitiveness (Rohrbeck & Gemunden, 2011), the industry requires the vibrancy of a technology savvy and innovative workforce.

Despite the important role Gen Y individuals stand to play in the growth of the hospitality industry, previous studies show that employees drawn from this generational unit and who work in the hospitality industry are an unsettled lot who are always looking for new challenges and adventures (Gursoy, Chi & Karadag, 2013; Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Further, Cho, Park, and Ordonez (2013) argue that the generations' orientation towards social networking makes them keen to work in companies with high presence of social media. There is no doubt, however, that high quality leader-member exchange can be used to sustain this cohort of individuals in their workplace, and in essence, motivate their innovativeness. Our study builds on McGregor's theory Y (Mulder, 2015) which advocates for the integration and stimulation of individuals to examine antecedents of Gen Y hospitality industry employees' innovative behaviour and the role supervisor support plays as a moderator of this relationship.

2. Literature Review

Innovative behaviour among employees is increasingly getting recognized as an enabler of competitive advantage (Zhou & Velamuri, 2018; Binder et al., 2016; Petra et al., 2013). Advancing innovating behaviour among employees is, thus, seen as a crucial step in the development of strategies targeting organizations (Yip & McKern, 2014). According to Abstein and Spieth (2014), employee innovative work behaviour is the intentional creation and use of novel ideas, products, processes, and/or services in a given task, group, or organization. In addition to idea generation, innovativeness relates to implementation of ideas generated (Parzefall, Seck & Leppanen, 2008).

In the hospitality industry, innovation is noted to be either radical in that new products and services are introduced into the market, or incremental where current services are improved or modified (Al-Ababneh, 2017). Wong and Pang as cited in Zhou & Velamuri (2018) further point out that innovation in the hotel industry includes development of new services and products, improvement of services, work procedures, products, and processes on a continuing basis, and enhancement of customer service. According to Ernest & Young (2015) in their study exploring demographic trends in population and workforce, the global workforce will comprise three quarters of Gen Y individuals by the year 2025. The implication is that Gen Y is taking over the workplace and will be at the epicenter of unprecedented decision making. This generational group exhibits peculiar characteristics that can inform their innovative abilities. Of consequence, Gen Y is a blue-collared-workforce having been born and raised in an environment loaded with new technology such as the internet, computers, and the mobile phone. These gadgets have tended to influence their lifestyle and way of doing things (Wood, 2013; Dolot, 2018; Nicholas, 2019; Turner, 2015). Indeed, Anantatmula & Shrivastav (2012) indicates that Gen Y use online social networks extensively and are likely to be more creative.

Perhaps a crucial characteristic about Gen Y individuals is their ability to accept and find comfort in different cultures and to embrace and value change (Dwyer, 2009). Individuals in this generation are thought to be flexible enough to adapt to shifts. According to Reilly (2012), this group feels motivated working with other people. A critical aspect that boosts their innovativeness is independence. It is argued that individuals in this generation

have a considerably high self-esteem, are confident about what they do, and like to oversee whatever they are doing albeit with some help from the internet (Reilly, 2012; Dolot, 2018). This way, they can stimulate creativity by venturing into new areas. Helyer and Lee (2012) aver that despite liking their independence, Gen Y populace also prefer collaborations and teamwork which are important elements in organizations desire for innovativeness.

Concerns are, however, raised by contextual success factors that have been associated with employee innovative behaviour. Previous studies have shown that work design in terms of tasks (Parzefall et al., 2008), job requirements (Goepel et al., 2012), job autonomy (Parzefall et al, 2012), reward and pay (Leung, 2012), training (Abdullah, et al., 2014), and resources and time (Parzefall et al., 2008) has a major influence on employees' work behaviour. The question then is whether such job characteristics can work in the predominantly service oriented hospitality industry. We, therefore, posit that: *Work design has no significant influence on innovative work behaviour of Gen Y employees in the hospitality industry.*

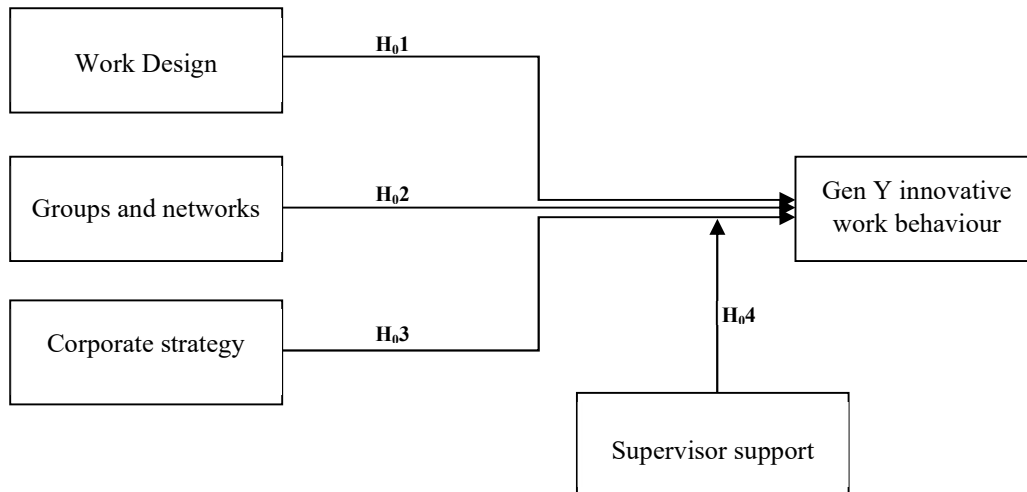
Group and networks in the form of relations and composition are also highlighted in literature as potential antecedents to employee innovative work behaviour. It is argued that relating with co-workers integrates employees well into their functions and team expectations (Ong et al., 2003; Zach, 2016). Besides, Zhou and Su (2010) contend that co-workers act as role models and are more of examples in behaviour. Group composition is viewed as a repertoire of knowledge, skills, and personality (Bogers, et al, 2018). Considering that Gen Y employees in the hospitality industry have been portrayed as a generation lacking in work ethic and loyalty (Marston, 2009), we question whether group and networks can work among Gen Y employees in the hospitality industry, and postulate that: *Group and networks have no significant influence on innovative work behaviour among Gen Y employees in the hospitality industry.*

Corporate strategy for innovation features in the available literature is indicated to relate to innovativeness among employees. It is argued that such a strategy informs cross-functional cooperation (Goepel et al., 2012), organizational structure (Parzefall et al, 2008), climate for innovation (Leung et al., 2014), and human resource management (Abstein & Spieth, 2014; May, 2015). In this vein, we question whether corporate strategy in the hospitality industry takes cognizance of Gen Y employees' innovative capabilities and posit that *Gen Y hospitality employees innovative work behaviour in the hospitality industry is independent of the corporate strategy existing.*

A lot of considerable attention has been devoted to examining the impact of leadership attributes on innovative behaviour among employees. Yuan and Woodman (2010) point to leader-employee relationship as being crucial for innovativeness among employees. De Jong and Den Hartog (2007) observe that employees expect leadership support. Pan et al., (2015) on the other hand contend that leaders ought to be role models in matters of innovation. In the event that supervisor support has been greatly associated with Gen Y employees' performance in the hospitality industry (Amstad et al., 2011; Hattke et al., 2017), we question whether such support can moderate the relationship between other characteristics and Gen Y innovative work behavior and hypothesize that *Supervisor support does not moderate the relationship between selected antecedents and Gen Y innovative work behaviour in the hospitality industry.*

The study, therefore, conceptualized that innovative behaviour among Gen Y employees in the hospitality industry is a function of selected factors, but the relationship is also moderated by supervisor support (fig 1).

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



3. Methodology

The study was conducted in star rated hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Our choice of hotels in Nairobi for this was based on the report by Cytonn Real Estate in conjunction with Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) that Nairobi is a leading travel destination (Cytonn, 2022), requiring that hotels remain innovative in their operations. The study adopted the positivist philosophical assumptions and explanatory design. The design enabled use of quantitative approaches to establish answers to the research question. A sample of 264 Gen Y employees was randomly selected for purposes of the study.

We collected data using a self-administered questionnaire and measured that using a 16-point Likert scale. This was adapted from Dorenbosch et al., (2005) and with a reported α -value of 0.92. Work design was measured using the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) developed and validated by Morgeson & Humphrey (2006). For groups and networks, we used a self-developed tool that took cognizance of the social networks theoretical principle which posits that networks should include groups of people who are in dialogue with each other (Lemke, 2001). Supervisor support was measured using a tool developed by Kottke & Sharafinski (1988) to measure perceived supervisory and organizational support.

Data was screened and cleaned for missing values and outliers leaving a total of 191 employees. Normality of data was examined using the Kolmogoror-Smirnoff test. All the statistics for the five variables were found to be non-significant ($p > 0.05$) indicating relatively normally distributed data across the variables. Multiple regression was used to identify antecedents of Gen Y hospitality employees' innovative work behaviour, while Hayes Macro Process was used to test for the moderating influence of supervisor support on the relationship between the identified antecedents and Gen Y innovative work behaviour. The test of highest order unconditional interaction was conducted between the antecedents and supervisor support to see the change in R^2 .

4. Results

Demographic results revealed that the participating Gen Y employees had commendable work experience and level of education that could nurture creativity as it were. Most of the employees have been working for a period ranging from 3 to 5 years (50.3%) and had a first degree (49.2%) (Table 1).

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

		<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Duration of employment	Below 1 year	34	17.8
	1-2 years	37	19.4
	3-5 years	96	50.3
	6-10 years	15	7.9
	above 10 years	9	4.7
	Total	191	100.0
Highest level of education	Masters	14	7.3
	undergraduate	94	49.2
	O-level	81	42.4
	primary	2	1.0
	Total	191	100.0

Correlation results between the selected antecedents and innovative work behaviour were significantly positive and thereby justified the use of regression to identify antecedents. In particular, Table 2 shows the groups and networks variable correlated significantly and positively with innovative work behaviour ($r=0.793$, $p<0.05$). There was also a significant and positive correlation between corporate strategy and innovative work behaviour ($r = 0.781$, $p<0.05$) and between work design and innovative work behaviour ($r=0.867$, $p<0.05$).

Table 2 Correlations between Antecedents and Innovative Work Behaviour

	Groups and Networks	Corporate Strategy	Work design	Innovative Work Behaviour
Groups and Networks	1			
Corporate Strategy	.771**	1		
Work design	.626**	.615**	1	
Innovative Work Behaviour	.793**	.781**	.867**	1

The regression model summary and ANOVA output (Table 3) revealed that work design, groups and network and existence of a corporate strategy explains up to 87.5% ($R^2 = 0.875$) of the variance in innovative work behaviour among Gen Y employees in the hospitality industry. In addition, the model relating to innovative work behaviour to the three antecedents was found to be a good fit ($F_{3, 187} = 436.469$, $p<0.05$).

Table 3 Model’s Goodness of Fit

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.935 ^a	.875	.873	.191	
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	48.017	3	16.006	436.469	.000 ^b
Residual	6.857	187	.037		
Total	54.874	190			

a. Dependent Variable: Innovative Work Behaviour

b. Predictors: (Constant), Work design, Corporate Strategy, Groups and Networks

The regression coefficients displayed in Table 4 reveal that both the unstandardized and standardized coefficients of all the three factors considered in the study were highly significant ($p < 0.01$). The collinearity statistics indicated that multicollinearity among the factors was not a matter of concern. Specifically, the study established that work design was a positive and significant antecedent of Gen Y employees’ innovativeness at the workplace ($B = 0.426$, $p < 0.05$); and that a unit percentage improvement in work design has propensity to raise innovative work behaviour among Gen Y employees in the hospitality industry by 0.426 percentage points.

Similarly, groups and networking were found to be a positive and significant antecedent of innovative work behaviour among Gen Y employees in the hospitality industry ($B = 0.277$, $p < 0.05$). A unit percentage improvement in groupings and networking among Gen Y could potentially raise their innovative work behaviour by 0.277 percentage points. The third factor, corporate strategy was also found to be a positive and significant antecedent of Gen Y employees innovative work behaviour ($B = 0.243$, $p < 0.05$). The implication of the unstandardized regression weight of 0.243 is that one percent improvement in corporate strategy targeting innovation is likely to occasion a 0.243 percentage points increase in Gen Y employees’ innovative behaviour (Table 4).

Table 4 Variable Coefficients

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	.226	.117		1.938	.054		
Groups and Networks	.277	.045	.264	6.183	.000	.368	2.718
Corporate Strategy	.243	.044	.234	5.562	.000	.376	2.659
Work design	.426	.026	.557	16.204	.000	.565	1.770

a. Dependent Variable: Innovative Work Behaviour

The test of highest order unconditional interaction (Table 5) revealed that the interaction between perceived supervisor support and antecedents of Gen Y employees innovative work behaviour had a significant R^2 change ($\Delta R^2 = 0.0246$, $p < 0.05$). Moderation was therefore supported. The implication of these results is that although the

given factors have positive impacts on Gen Y employees’ innovative behaviour in the hospitality industry, supervisor support plays a key role in moderating this relationship.

Table 5 Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s)

	R ² -chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0246	8.1304	1.0000	157.0000	.0049

X-Antecedents

W-Supervisor support

Table 6 presents a summary of the results of the analysis emerging from the multiple regressions and Hayes’ Macro Process.

Table 6 Summary of Findings

Aim	Inferential statistics	Findings
1. Influence of work design on Gen Y hospitality employees’ innovative work behaviour	B = 0.426, p = 0.000	Work design is a positive and significant antecedent of Gen Y hospitality employees’ innovative work behaviour
2. Influence of corporate strategy on Gen Y hospitality employees’ innovative work behaviour	B = 0.243, p = 0.000	Corporate strategy is a positive and significant antecedent of Gen Y hospitality employees’ innovative work behaviour
3. Influence of groups and networks on Gen Y hospitality employees’ innovative work behaviour	B = 0.277, p = 0.000	Groups and networks positively and significantly influence Gen Y hospitality employees’ innovative work behaviour.

5. Discussions

The study empirically confirms that Gen Y employees’ innovative behaviour is a function of work design, corporate strategy, and groups and networks. Further, it does show that each of these factors investigated influences Gen Y employees’ innovative behaviour to varying degrees. Groups and networks and corporate strategy appear to have a higher influence on Gen Y employees innovative work behaviour. These findings corroborate human resource management propositions that identify groups and networks as being critical in employee integration of functions and expectations (see Ong et al., 2003; Meroño-Cerdán & López-Nicolás, 2017; Zennouche, Zhang & Wang, 2014; Osman, Shariff & Lajin, 2016). Moreover, groups have been viewed as a repertoire of skills, knowledge, and personality (see Bogers et al., 2018; Sweiss & Yamin, 2020; Razavi & Attarnezhad, 2013). Corporate strategy has previously been seen as a core element in cross functional operations,

organizational structure, innovativeness, and human resource management (Abstein & Spieth, 2014; Goepel et al., 2012; Leung et al., 2014; May, 2015; Parzefall et al., 2008).

The findings suggest that the hospitality industry needs to concentrate on nurturing and empowering supervisors to interact with Gen Y employees. Persons chosen to be supervisors should give due consideration to supporting employees in achieving their tasks and goals. Indeed, supervisor support has been found to be critical in nurturing employee progressiveness and more importantly, in molding the desired character (De Jong & De Hartog, 2007; Pan et al., 2015; Yuan & Woodman, 2010; Hon, Chan & Lu, 2013).

Significantly, the study demonstrates that supervisor support moderates the relationship between antecedents of Gen Y employees innovative work behaviour. It confirms that supervisors are at the epicenter of employees' innovativeness in the hospitality industry. The bottom line then is that supervisors shoulder a lot of responsibility in Gen Y employees continued stay in the industry. This perhaps means that supervisors in the hospitality industry need to exploit reported ability of Gen Y individuals to embrace diverse culture, and their flexibility in motivating their performance (Dwyer, 2009; Reilly, 2012).

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

The study adds to the existing body of literature in human resources studies. Importantly, it forms as an empirical basis for more research on the generation Y and could be applied in managing workplace issues particularly in the post-pandemic tourism and hospitality industry.

5.2 Practical Implications

In this study, we explore general Y workplace behavior and how that can be orchestrated favorably for the performance. This populace of workers is reported to be nonchalant, confident, and innovative; a necessary ingredient in workplace progression. Using supervision as a moderator of behavior, we present insights and ideas to the understanding of the group and suggest what could be done to embrace them in the 21st century workplace particularly in the tourism and hospitality industry.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

The study was conducted in an urban setting and targeted employees in the hospitality industry. This is a contextual limitation as the results may not necessarily be generalized for the other sub-sectors of the tourism industry that have different work environments. Further, other than supervisor support, there could be other moderator factors such as competency levels and motivation among others that may affect innovativeness. These are potential areas of further investigation.

6. Conclusions

The study revealed that work design, groups and networks, and corporate strategy are critical antecedents of Gen Y employees' innovative work behaviour. However, supervisor support should not be ignored. We suggest that even when encouraging groups and networks, and focusing more on work design and corporate strategy, the hospitality industry ought to pay attention to individuals appointed in positions of team leadership (supervisors, managers, heads of sections etc.). Doing this has the potential to prevent consequences of losing Gen Y's innovativeness and stemming turnover intentions.

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